



**TRINITY**  
United Methodist Church

## Child Protection Policy and Procedures

## I. **PURPOSE**

To help Trinity United Methodist Church ("Trinity") provide a caring and secure environment for children and youth in all phases of church life and to help protect the employees and volunteers of Trinity from false allegations of misconduct.

## II. **BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

Trinity seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and youth, and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

*And they were bringing children to him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.*

Mark 10: 13-16

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow; a place where care givers, teachers and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

### III. SELECT PROVISIONS OF VIRGINIA'S CHILD ABUSE LAW

Trinity has adopted the following definitions as set forth in Va. Code Ann. § 63.2-100. Below are the relevant provisions of Virginia law:

"Abused or neglected child" means any child less than 18 years of age:

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § [18.2-248](#);
2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law; or
5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis.

### IV. TYPES OF ABUSE

Trinity does not condone any abuse at anytime of anyone. The Virginia Department of Social Services has provided some useful definitions that Trinity is adopting:

**Child abuse:** An act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.

**Physical Abuse:** A physical injury, threat of injury, or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, stabbing wounds.

**Physical Neglect:** The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a Child if the Child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.

**Sexual Abuse:** Any act defined in the *Code of Virginia* that is committed or allowed to be committed, upon a Child by his/her parent or other person responsible for the Child's care. Examples of such abuse are sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, and other sexual abuse.

**Medical Neglect:** The refusal or failure by a care giver to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental, or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

**Failure to Thrive:** A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

**Mental Abuse/Neglect:** A pattern of acts or omissions by the caregiver that results in harm to a Child's psychological or emotional health or development.

**Educational Neglect:** The failure of the Child's caretaker to ensure that the Child attends school or an approved alternative program of study.

**Bizarre Discipline:** Any actions in which the caregiver uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the Child's behavior.

## **V. REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Trinity, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized.

### **A. Trinity Sponsored and Non-Trinity Sponsored User Groups Involving Youth**

Trinity sponsored youth activities shall comply with all sections of the Child Protection Policy. An exception to this requirement may be made for groups, programs, or activities that meet in a non-classroom or open forum setting (i.e. the Sanctuary or Trinity Hall).

All Non-Trinity groups are required to execute and submit the Trinity Building Use Agreement to the Trinity office personnel prior to utilizing the facilities. The Trinity Building Use Agreement makes reference to the Child Protection Policy and an authorized representative of each Non-Trinity group will be required to read and document their understanding of the Child Protection Policy, and agree to abide by provisions of the Child Protection Policy (as applicable). Use of the Trinity property without a signed Trinity Building Use Agreement is deemed to be unauthorized use of the property.

### **B. Employee and Volunteer Screening/ Reference Checks**

Effective November 1, 2008, all Trinity employees and any volunteers that work with children or youth under the age of 18 (e.g., children's teachers, child care workers, Pre-School teachers and aides, scout and youth leaders, etc.), in Trinity sponsored or non-Trinity sponsored programs, will be asked to sign a statement that he/she has never pled guilty to or no contest to or been convicted of child abuse or had such a conviction expunged and shall sign a release so a National Criminal Records Background check can be completed.

These statements are a part of the information that is provided to the current provider of background checks as selected by the church staff.

No one who has had a child abuse conviction or has had a prior conviction expunged -- or who refuses to complete this screening form -- will be permitted to work with Trinity's children or youth.

Volunteers will be required to renew background checks and sign a verification of training form every five years. During this Five year period, additional training updates could be required based upon policy revisions and changes in local and state codes.

### **C. Training**

Before beginning the first year of service following the adoption of the Child Protection Policy, all Trinity employees and volunteers (including but not limited to, child care workers, Pre-School teachers and aides, children's Sunday School teachers and youth workers, and teachers) will be required to read Trinity's Child Protection Policy and sign a statement indicating that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by it. This statement shall be part of the screening form (copy attached). Such persons also will be required to attend one training session related to Trinity's Child Protection Policy during the course of their first year of service following the adoption of the Child Protection Policy. The Pre-School Director will ensure that annual training is provided for Pre-School teachers and aides. Anyone failing to sign this statement will be contacted. If the employee or volunteer does not sign the statement after being contacted, that person will not be permitted to serve until the Child Protection Policy has been read and the form signed.

Scouting leaders and leaders of other groups of children or youth who regularly use Trinity's facilities also will be required to read the Child Protection Policy and sign the acknowledgement form. Trinity's facilities will not be available to any children's or youth group whose leaders refuse to read the Child Protection Policy and sign the acknowledgement form. Any other children's or youth groups who seek to use Trinity's facilities will be given a copy of the Child Protection Policy and be required to comply therewith as a condition to the use of such facilities.

#### **D. The Two Adult Rule**

An "adult" is defined as an individual that is eighteen years of age or older. A "primary" adult, leader, teacher, or helper is defined as an adult who has:

- ① satisfied the background check;
- ② attended training;
- ③ signed an agreement to follow Child Protection Policy;
- ④ is at least five years older than the oldest youth they are supervising; and

Every meeting of children and youth must have a minimum of two adults. There should never be a case where one adult and one child/student are alone together, unless a parent with their own child. Other church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church will have two or more leaders present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and should include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender. Parental permission must be given for an overnight at the church, or if a church group leaves the premises.

### **E. Exceptions to the Two Adult Rule**

When the "Two Adult Rule" is not feasible, an approved adult leader will be required to conduct unannounced and randomly timed spot checks.

During the Sunday School hour, there may be one teacher in a classroom with multiple children.

For transportation where there is more than one vehicle in use, a vehicle may have just one adult driver as long as there is a group (more than one child) of children/youth not exceeding the adult/student ratios and the 2-adult rule is met at the destination of the trip.

In the case of one on one (1 adult & 1 youth/child) counseling sessions, the sessions must be conducted in plain sight of and in full knowledge of others, away from others in large room, in public places, or in an office (with a window or open door) in a busy section of building.

Residential/Overnight Events: Any overnight event is classified as residential. In residential settings, overnight supervision must always be by Approved Adult Leaders of the same gender as the participants. Approved Adult Leaders shall not share the same bed with a child or youth under any circumstances. Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult to Approved Adult Leader ratios should be followed.

In the case of Trinity's Pre-School program, two teachers will be assigned to every one and two-year old classroom. While only one teacher is assigned to every three and four-year old classroom, teachers aides will be assigned, whenever possible, to assist the teachers in such classrooms. In addition, either the Director or the Assistant Director of the Pre-school will be available at all times to make random, unannounced visits to these classrooms. For off-premises Pre-School trips, two or more teachers and/or aides will always accompany the class. In addition, whenever possible, parents (both male and female) will be encouraged to accompany the class on off-premises trips.

### **G. Classroom Management**

All employees and volunteers will use the following discipline measures:

- If a child is behaving inappropriately, the employee or volunteer will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior (e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building.");

- If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity;
- If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other children;
- If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the following people and left under that person's supervision:
  1. the parent or guardian;
  2. Director of Children's Ministries;
  3. Director of Student Ministries;
  4. Assistant Director of Student Ministries; or
  5. the Sunday School Superintendent
- *No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, is to be used at any time;*
- If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

#### H. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by Trinity employees, volunteers, or parents. Windows on the classroom doors should never be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation of the classroom from the hallway. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted by the Director of Children's Ministries, the Director of Student Ministries, Assistant Director of Student Ministries, and the Sunday School Superintendent during Sunday School hours.

**VI. REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE**

**The allegation of child/youth/at-risk adult abuse is very serious. Throughout the course of the exploration of alleged incident, both prayer and the appropriate pastoral care resources must be made available to all those in need.**

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Trinity (including Trinity Pre-School and Boy/Girl Scout activities), the matter must be reported immediately to the Senior Minister. In the absence of the Senior Minister or if the Senior Minister is being accused, the matter is reported to the Associate Minister. Additionally, the Chair of Church Council, Chair of Trustees and the Chair of Staff Parish Relations will get notice that there has been an allegation. The Senior Minister (or the Associate Minister if need be) will notify Trinity's General Counsel or Associate General Counsel. The General Counsel or Associate General Counsel will do the following:

- A. Collect a written statement from the reporting person(s);
- B. Document the specifics of the alleged incident on the Report of Suspected Abuse;
- C. Notify the Virginia Department of Social Services in Henrico County by calling the Child Protective Service office at 501-5437. If the Henrico office is closed, then notify the Virginia Department of Social Services State Hot Line (children/youth) 1-800-552-7096 (24 hours a day/7 days a week). State Hot Line (adults) 1-888-83-ADULT;
- D. Once the report has been filed with Child Protective Services, the parents/guardian of the child/youth/at-risk adult must be contacted by the Senior Minister/designee, unless the parents/guardians in the home are suspected of the alleged abuse;
- E. Notify the Three Notch'd District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church;
- F. Notify the church's insurance company;
- G. All interviews, conversations, and actions will be documented in writing;
- H. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the alleged accused. However, it will be necessary to discuss the allegation(s) with a limited number of appropriate individuals;
- I. No outside media will be contacted and no statements generated other than by the appointed Trinity spokesperson;

- J. No one shall confront the accused with the allegations unless and until advised by state or local authorities and/or Three Notch'd District Superintendent; and
- K. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties.

**VII. POLICY REVIEW**

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of Trinity United Methodist Church shall be reviewed bi-annually by the Board of Trustees. To ensure the integrity of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures, an annual report will be made to the Church Council.

I \_\_\_\_\_, have received, read, and agree to the provisions listed in this child protection document. While I am working with children and/or students at Trinity United Methodist Church, I agree to abide by the policies and procedures contained herein.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date